DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 107 152 FL 006 924

AUTHOR Currie, William B.
TITLE European Syllabuses in English as a Foreign Language.
PUB DATE 24 May 75
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the University of Toronto Conference on Second Language Teaching Methodology (May 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.95 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Applied Linguistics; Audiolingual Methods; Bilingualism; *English (Second Language); Language Guides; *Language Instruction; Language Skills; Language Usage; Linguistic Competence; Psycholinguistics; *Semantics; Semiotics; *Teaching Methods; Verbal Communication
IDENTIFIERS *Communicative Competence

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to characterize what seem to be key movements in the teaching of EFL at various levels in Europe. These movements reveal that semantic approaches to language teaching are widespread. Recent research into the effectiveness of teaching methods has demonstrated how difficult it is to show whether audiolingual or cognitive code approaches are effective. A strong movement toward semantic syllabuses has developed, partly as a consequence of this, and work undertaken through the Council of Europe has concentrated on this since 1969. The characteristics of these syllabuses are that they aim to provide language structure which will be effective in communication situations, and attempts are being made to specify an inventory of (1) those structures necessary for control of the fundamentals of English, French, Spanish, etc. (up to "threshold level") and (2) those notions which a speaker would require to handle defined language exchanges. An interesting relationship may be traced between these semantic syllabuses and traditional rhetoric. A further link exists between the logic of speech acts and "notional" inventories. Examples of semantic syllabuses in use in Europe are drawn from adult English teaching and certain elementary school projects. (Author/AM)

ED107152

for ERIC : Tuscaloosa

EUROPEAN SYLLABUSES IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Paper for University of Toronto
Conference: Second Language Teaching
Methodology, 1975.
May 24th, 1975.

W.B. CURRIE
Concordia University, Montreal.

This paper is an attempt to characterize what seem to me to be key movements in the teaching of EFL at various levels in Europe. The picture emerging from the last decade of EFL teaching in Europe, however, is not sharply focussed; how could it be? Europe is not a single state with a uniform set of policies for English; the countries concerned have different traditions of education and very different levels of achievement in their language teaching policies. On the one hand we have the impressive products of the northern countries, Norway, Sweden and Denmark and the substantial achievements of certain provinces in Germany and the Low Countries. On the other, our definition of Europe embraces Greece and Cyprus with very distinctive attitudes to language study and a background of diglossia; and Finland and Belgium with a bilingual tradition, not including English. Even in parsimonious summary form the facts relating to European teaching of English as a foreign language are bewildering. For instance, the documents produced for the Council of Europe specialist conference 'Curricula for the Teaching of English in European

FL006927

Secondary Schools' held in London in May 1969[1] (a very important conference from which many developments have sprung) dealt with profiles of eighteen different countries participating in the conference. I have, thus, decided to focus on the following aspects of the topic: (i) to provide a short discussion of European "neo-orthodoxy" in the teaching of English as a foreign language, (ii) to discuss certain pointers in recent relevant research, (iii)to describe the important movement towards a unit-credit system in Europe involving 'notional' or semantic syllabuses and (iv) to point to interesting developments in specialized syllabuses for EFL. Those who wish to have a more detailed survey of language teaching trends in European schools from 1920-1970 should refer to Strevens 'Trends' (1970).

Despite the diversity in Europe, there are features of how English is normally taught as a foreign language which contribute to our understanding of the contemporary situation, especially in the context of comparative studies between Europe and North America. Firstly, we should remember that the language is taught in the context of a liberal, non-specialist curriculum largely oriented towards the humanities. In this curriculum, the higher levels are usually linked with a study of English literature or of comparative literature. The idea of language justified by literature has been a motivating factor in Europe in the last 30 years, but the rise of interest in pragmatic syllabuses, which have become communication centred has recently much diminished the status of literature; it is important to realize, however, that it has <u>not</u> removed it from the syllabus. The trend has been

to extend the influence of textual study into varieties of resourceful language use not normally labelled literature. German high school students, for instance read a whole spectrum of texts from daily newspapers to scientific articles. There is a growing demand for articles with a serious political or social comment to make, linking language and life.

Secondly, in our mini-catalogue of European 'neo-orthodoxy', there is a strong socio-cultural motivation in Europe towards multilingualism - that an educated man should control at least one foreign language of use to him. In my own mind I identify this as an extension of a well-known principle from Gleason (1964) An educated man should be able to think rationally and incisively about his environment and about his human situation'. In present-day Europe we would add, and to be productively in control of a foreign language spoken by his wider community.[1] (See Currie 1973:14 for further discussion).

Thirdly, Europe has recently shown a clear trend away from linguistic selection and sequencing in its language teaching programmes. Wilkins has described this as 'the necessity to abandon the conventional grammatical syllabus which attempts to teach the entire grammatical system without regard to its application to specific language needs and to the fact that not all parts of the system are equally important to all learners.' (1972:1). From another angle, Europe is seen as moving away from the sentence towards the utterance (Candlin 1972:4), that is, away from structure-specific language grading to situation-specific grading. We will return to this later, in detail.

Fourthly, we should remind ourselves of the approach to language through meaning in the European tradition. Briefly, the cardinal points are that (a) Language items are taught in language contexts, i.e. teaching the item in a text whose general meaning is understood, or alternatively, constructing ad hoc contexts for items to be learned, "co-text" as some of the Firthians call it. (b) Teaching in situations: Suiting tne item to be taught to the non-language elements of the situation of utterance, in the tradition of situational semantics à la Firth (1935, 1951) and latterly, Lyons, (1963, 1966). Techniques derived include puppet dialogues, games, role simulation, etc. (c) By explanation: Definition, discussion and paraphrase both in the target language and in the mother tongue, are used quite normally in European language teaching, "neo-orthodoxy", especially in the upper schools and in adult work.

Developments in linguistics and psycholinguistics have had an effect - a sobering effect - on European approaches to language teaching methodology and syllabuses. Two recent experiments illustrate this well, Casey (1968) and the GUME Project, as reported by Levin (1969). Both reveal a deep interest in the relationship between psycholinguistic theory and methods of teaching English as a foreign language. Let me deal with Casey first. His study, conducted through the Institute of Education of Helsinki University was entitled "The Effectiveness of Two Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language in some Finnish secondary Schools". Casey identified two extremes of method based on current language learning theory - the audio-lingual habit method and the cognitive code method. He

ask this, 'When there is an observable and measurable difference in method, does the teacher using an oral approach achieve better results in developing oral skills with his pupils than a teacher who uses a non-oral approach?' To deal with the relative effectiveness of method, however, he had to devise an instrument which he calls a gross estimator of method. Broadly it was a scale on the Likert principle which identified audio-lingual habit theory as one end of a continuum and cognitive code theory as the other. Let me remind you of these poles (if indeed they be poles): The audio-lingual theory propounds the primacy of speech; it promotes the inculcation of speech habits via drills, etc. which automatize habits as much as possible so that they can be called forth without conscious attention, and holds that practice by repetition is the chief means of producing language habits. There is a close link between this theory and the tenets of behavioral psychology. Cognitive-code learning holds that if a learner knows the rules of language form, understanding the structures intellectually, he can use this knowledge to crack the code of language and use it correctly. The method is associated with Gestalt and Piagetian theories of learning, which see language as a unit not divided into form and matter. This approach is usually associated with translation and the written language. (See Carroll, 1965). Casey decided that a method is best measured by identifying the teacher's attitude to it and assuming that the teaching was under the influence of that attitutde. He thus devised a 20 point Likert scale and plotted on it where teachers fell in their attitude. The

attitude was defined by discovering whether the teachers agreed with selected statements about language teaching in a questionnaire in which audio-lingual and cognitive code principles were stated in a mixed selection, together with distracters. Casey assumed that teacher attitude was the main determinant of method. He plotted the participating teachers as more-or-less audio-lingual or more-or-less cognitive code and set about measuring the progress of their classes. His two hypotheses were broadly that pupils taught by audio-lingual teachers would be superior in oral skills to those taught by teachers oriented towards the cognitive code approach. Conversely, pupils taught by cognitive-code teachers would be superior in tests of written translation to those whose teaching had been in the hands of teachers slanted towards audio-lingual approaches.

He conducted his experiment in the secondary school system and he used existing classes of the fourth and fifth forms, involving some 450 pupils in all. Casey is, of course, grappling with a type of experiment which, it seems to some of us, can bring only sorrow. The uncontrollable variables, relating to teachers, to corporate and individual attitudes of learners and to the considerable differences which exist between individual learners and separate groups of learners have troubled most wide-scale methods research, including large scale investigations such as the Pennsylvania Project, (1968). Here are Casey's conclusions. "... the number of variables affecting English language learning in Finnish Secondary Schools was so great that it was impossible

to s.y anthing other than (i) that language learning "as measured by (his) 'English Usage Test' apparently increases as the number of year-hours of instruction increases. ...On the oral test battery, pupils in the experimental group, who had studied under teachers using an oral approach, recognized more phonemic distinctions, had better pronunciation on selected phonemes, constructed more complicated oral dialogue than the control group, but in no case was the difference statistically significant." (1968:36). He goes on to say also that fluency improvement was not statistically significant for the 'oral' groups. In tests of two-way written translation, pupils who studied under teachers not using an oral approach tended to do better in tests of written translation, but significance was not beyond the .15 level. In a word, Casey had illustrated the inevitable movement toward the centre which we have seen in other recent educational experiments.

Casey's results reflect the difficulties of finding out anything significant about methods by clinical experimental approaches in schools. It appears that we just cannot plug the holes. The experiments conducted by the GUME team, however, in 1969 (The Gothenborg Undervisnings Metod Engelska)(Levin, 1969) applied a formidable talent to fashioning an experiment to test a limited amount of English structure taught in three clearly defined ways. The do-construction, the some/any dichotomy and the passive voice were selected and taught by (a) an implicit method based on associationism (drilling) in learning items, with a strict behavioural attitude to the learning process in

which imitation and repetition were prominent learning techniques; in other terms, an audio-lingual habit method. (b) The structures were also taught by two holistic methods aided by explanation, namely the explicit verbalization of rules. In one case the explanations were given in English (the target language) and in the other the explanations were given in Swedish (the mother tongue) both cognitive approaches. A highly sophisticated design was adopted to control variables in which a main feature was the elimination of the teacher. A taped mode of instruction was used. A pre-test, post-test and re-test model (to check for retention) was used and the results of the tests were subjected to careful statistical analysis. We must remember that one of the designs for tight control on the GUME experiments was that the large Pennsylvania project has failed to produce the kinds of results predicted, for instance had failed to show that the presence or absence of a language laboratory approach was a significant factor in learning performance in a foreign language. GUME rings with the resolve to tighten up controls and limit the scope of the experiment so that clear results might emerge. The Swedish public had taken a great interest in this experiment also and the results were awaited with hope that they would help the school system to abandon unproductive and gimmicky methods of language teaching and adopt more fruitful ones. The results were that there was a considerable increase of learning shown in the post-test but that no interaction between teaching strategy and attainment level was evidenced, 'Thus the experiment has not shown that any difference exists between the three teaching methods' (Levin 1969:77). As the cartoon on the report's title page puts it 'All methods are best!'.

The two research results which I have quoted, taken together with the failure of the Pennsylvania project to show advantages for using the language laboratory (findings, by the way, confirmed by Davies (1972) in Edinburgh) really suggest to us that there is no clearly defined direction for syllabuses emerging from studies of comparative efficiency of learning. On the one hand this produces a sense of agnosticism and a state of humility, but on the other it makes syllabus reformers consider non-clinical approaches to the revision of the syllabus. The particular emphasis which has emerged since 1972 in the papers of the Council of Europe committee of experts, eg., Wilkins (1972), Candlin (1972) and van Ek (1972) is that a syllabus should be defined notionally in terms of the purposes for which the language is to be used rather than by linguistic items identified by the grammar or the lexicon. An informal semantic approach is used to identify the functions of language in society and there is a patent reliance on meaning in this situational sense. I shall argue that this approach, although new, is basically the approach of traditional rhetoric. A concept of the learning target as 'communicative competence' has emerged; this is discourse-specific, that is, is centred on the idea of the utterance and its audience; it is a communication unit, rather than a grammatical one. Before an utterance can reach the level of communication it has to be processed and the linguistic encoding must not only follow the rules of the grammar of the language, but the rules of language use, which are social in nature. There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless. To paraphrase a point made by Halliday in Cambridge in 1969 'Behind the output of language lie the networks of grammatical and semantic systems, and behind these lie the sociological choices related to man speaking to man.'

What are the characteristics of an utterance in the context of a pedagogical grammar ? Candlin had some interesting things to say about this in his paper (1972) at Neuchatel. Most applied linguists in Europe today link utterance with the idea of the speech act, that is, the performative prefix we could ascribe to every piece of communicative language. For example, we may prefix 'I state','I warn', 'I apologise', etc to the logic. This prefix indicates that every utterance has two elements - a propositional element and a function indicator. The function indicator is often called the illocutionary act (after Austin, 1955). These function elements (semiotic acts) may be extracted from utterances and can yield sets of language functions: - e.g. asking questions, giving and responding to commands, greetings, advising, warning etc. We could group related acts into a pattern:

explain, enquire, describe, instruct,
hypothesise, plan, analyse, compare, decide, test
etc.....
persuade, conciliate, encourage, discourage, recruit, dissuade
etc..... (See Candlin 1972: 5-6)

This is close to Halliday's (1969) proposals in Relevant Models of Language , where he gives a list of the earliest semiotic acts in child language: I want, do as I tell you, me and him, here I come, tell me why, let's pretend, I've got something to tell you.

The utterance is , from a communication point of view, much more important than syntax or phonology. It is not the grammaticality of a stretch of language which decides its acceptability, but its socio-linguistic context.

"...in other words, in order to judge whether a sentence is correct in its context, we must know something about the speaker's unstated belief about the world...it is important to realise that no grammatical rule, transformational or otherwise can be given to enable the learner to make the right choice'. (Slightly adapted from Candlin and Lakov.)

Clearly, this view takes us out of the domain of linguistics (as we generally understand the term); further, it poses problems which are beyond the scope of any single system of explanation in linguistics. Candlin, Wilkins, Halliday and Sinclair all use informal semantic categories not so much as part of a logic (that is well ahead of our present position) but rather as part of a common sense philosophy of the social use of utterances. Note that I use the term common sense in a semi-technical way ... that which is understood by all those involved in a given universe of discourse. Wilkins makes an important pitch for the wide applicability of the utterance notions he identifies. He points out that there is no reason to restrict them to English; they have counterparts in French, German, Spanish, etc. He points out, however, that this is not to argue that they are universals of language in any theoretical sense (1972). It is with this in mind that we employ the term 'common sense'.

The proposals for a notional syllabus for out-of-school adult learners in Europe have been carried out under the auspices of the Council of Europe. The target is a unit-credit system described by J.L.M. Trim in one of the clutch of papers delivered at Strasbourg in 1972. Other studies in this group were Candlin (1972) on pedagogical grammars, van Ek on the threshhold level, Richterich, on language needs for adult learners and Klaus Bung's specification of objectives for the adult system. Wilkin's paper (1972), which I hold to be of critical importance, was entitled The Common Core in a Unit/Credit System (Linguistic and Situational Content).

We are witnessing a curious development in Europe. On the one hand there has been extensive work carried out at the elementary levels in school and there is more substantial project work to follow, e.g. Hawkes (1974) on the York English Project. On the other we have Wilkins and others interested in the adult learner. We are presented with what I see as the phenomenon of the 'maturational sandwich'. The adult programmes following semantic syllabuses and several other developments in English for special purposes, specify communiative competence as their goal. The elementary school programmes also use this concept; both emphasize socially directed activities in the teaching. It is almost as if we were discovering that Fröebel techniques applied to young school children and to highly motivated adults. Between these groups lie the formative years of the secondary school, - the filling of the sandwich - and it is particularly in this area that we have a

paucity of ideas and a lack of objectives and goals. Wilkins (1972) is directed towards the needs of adults and has no immediate proposals for this school sector. I do not believe, however, that the neglect of the secondary school is a problem of method at all; it is a problem of motivation to learn. The 13-16 age group is, in my experience, the most difficult to handle because of motivational problems. Their spontaneity for class activities is lower than we find in the elementary school; they are restless socially; the ameliorating influence of social class with its patently clear link between better class, better discipline and better learning is disappearing as Europe goes educationally comprehensive. The result of this sandwich is that we tend to get enlightened and agreeable teaching at elementary and adult levels (irrespective of the stage of the studies) and the vital school years in the middle are filled with language-specific, highly programmed courses, repetitions of work already done in elementary, either semi-traditional grind or audio-lingual grind. I am alarmed to find that this pattern is repeating itself in Canada, particularly in Quebec.

The notional approach in a nutshell is this: the language to be learned is defined by the objects of communication and not by grammatical or structural criteria. It was, however, agreed at the policy-forming meeting which launched the Council of Europe effort - the Ruschliken Symposium (1971) - that it was not feasible to ignore grammar of a more general sort in the syllabus; thus, communicative competence must use existing linguistic competence, albeit elementary. But, this core is not necessarily situation- or use-specific. It is the minimal inventory of grammatical systems and vocabulary

which can make communicative competence possible. This is defined as the 'threshhold level" (or T-level). This T-level, together with the situationally defined units which follow it make up the common core. Wilkins 1972 paper and one in preparation (1975) attempt to define the grading and the linguistic correlates of a syllabus above and below the T-level when communicative competence is the guiding principle. The main development since 1972 is that the threshhold level for English has been specified.[1] Parallel versions for French, German and Spanish are in preparation.

There is a difference between situational teaching and teaching for communication. Teaching structures or items in a situation is a way of making pre-selected language items meaningful by setting them in an obvious context of situation. A syllabus with communicative competence as its guiding principle begins with the functions of the language and selects only those items which are necessary for the carrying out of those functions. The notional approach asks 'What are the notions that a European learner will expect to be able to express through the target language?' (Wilkins, 1972:2). In establishing a semantic syllabus, therefore, we must first establish what a speaker needs to say, and what social and other constraints there are on the utterances. Through this, we can identify the range of structures, vocabulary, styles and idioms that are required

Wilkins identifies two major types of notional category: firstly, he lists what he calls semantico-grammatical categories.

---

[1] van Ek (1975) has specified the T-level in a book not seen at the time of writing this paper, but referred to in a private communication with Wilkins.

likely would be language involving warning, threatening, invitation, etc. The notional category of suasion is (a) associated with a complex of situations, and (b) is not tied to any grammatical form. If a form is learned solely for a situation, the notional target may be frustrated. Thus, a notional syllabus, as I interpret it, aims at the generalization of items and the relation of these to the grammatical and lexical system. It is thus, open ended, and personal and is ideally linked with a method such as guided discovery. We have already spoken of the importance of adult motivation in learning. It is probable that the notionally oriented syllabus would not work if the communicative interest of the units were not discerned by the learners. We should also note that this approach to classroom learning (guided discovery) lends itself to casual cyclic exposure to language and within a notional approach this is a highly necessary feature if generalization is to take place.

An interesting link may be traced between the postulates of notional syllabuses and the principles of traditional rhetoric. Note that I refer to rhetoric in its European sense here, that is, to the classically inspired rhetoric which marked much of the work on style of the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe (in Scotland particularly) and in America. I do not refer here to the contemporary 'rhetorics' of the composition courses of North America, e.g. Christensen (1967). These modern systems are much taken up with formulae for the construction of grammatically acceptable sentences. Classical rhetoric was concerned with the purpose of

that is, those notions which, in European languages at least, interact significantly with grammatical categories: time (point of time, duration, time relations, sequence, age,) quantity, space, matter, case (a Fillmorean approach - agentive, objective, dative, instrumental, locative, factitive,benefective) and deixis. For each of these and their subdivisions, Wilkins lists grammatical realizations, which might be covered in the course.

Secondly, he lists categories of communicative function, - the language of doing as opposed to the language of reporting action. 'What people want to do through language is more important than mastery of language as an unapplied system' (Wilkins 1972:12). These categories are not restricted to what we have come to call 'speech acts'. Notions may deal with cases in which there are numerous realizations possible and no grammatical restriction on which is chosen. These are some of his categories: modality certainty, necessity, conviction, volition, obligation incurred and imposed, moral discipline and evaluation, suasion, argument, personal emotions, emotional relations, and interpersonal relations.

A syllabus with the object of effectiveness of communication cannot fail to have methodological implications. Clearly a situational approach to the teaching is going to have strong applicability. But notions go beyond language-in-situation. For example, they involve purpose, attitude, and interpersonal relationships. Suasion, for instance may involve the speaker in persuading, advising, advocating, etc. someone to do something, but just as

utterances and it is at once a sociolinguistic, speculative philosophy on the nature of language and a guide to the analysis of style. Grierson (1944) sums up Aristotelian rhetoric in this way... "The study of how to express oneself correctly and effectively, bearing in mind the nature of the language we use, the subject we are speaking or writing about, the kind of audience we have in view ... and the purpose, which last is the main determinant." (Grierson, 1944). The traditional grammars of the school up to and including our present day in Europe (and in selected parts of North America), were linked with this rhetoric. Grammar was seen as a handhold on meaning and function. Form and function were allies. It was really only in this century that, under the influence of more empirical philosophies (positivism mainly) the link between purpose-style and form-function were doubted via the empiricist's question 'Under what conditions is proposition P seen to be true?' (Fodor and Garrett, 1966). Linguistics and psychology in the first half of this century (and into our own time) moved quickly into the new scientific objectivism, which in itself was a salutary and appropriate movement. Unfortunately, as you know, the movement in America became over stimulated and took on a decidedly iconoclastic character. I need only refer you to the intemperate statements made by Bloomfield (1933) in his attacks on 'benighted' school grammars. This was followed by a great literature of dissent in the U.S.A. in which 'mentalism' or indeed any kind of semantic basis for grammar or

any kind of functional classification of language was denounced. It is important to realize that this reaction did not take place in Europe. The semantics of context proposed by Firth, for instance (context of situation) is functionally oriented (See Firth 1951). Halliday's proposals for linguistic description (with the possible exception of a paper in 1961) developed this line. Lyons (1963, 1966 etc.) also stressed situational meaning. It seems to me that a direct and logical route leads us from the rhetoric of the nineteenth century in Europe (particularly in Scotland) to the situational semantics of our decade, with semantic syllabuses as the most popular focus of this movement.

The principles of the semantic syllabus are associated with several important research and development projects. Candlin, Bruton and Leather at Lancaster University are carrying out a project under the auspices of the Medical Research Council entitled English Language Skills for Overseas Directors and Medical Staff. (1975 continuing). Taken in conjucntion with Candlin's more recent paper Some Metalinguistic Problems in Communicative Language Learning (1975 forthcoming) this research effectively reviews the strengths and weaknesses of the 'notional' approach and takes the first sound theoretical and practical steps in (a) identifying the active elements of a communicative situation ('botanizing' it - Candling) and (b) pointing to the priorities a teaching programme inthis field would have to select. The 'botanizing' of medical English has been undertaken before and shaped into a notional syllabus (Currie, Stuttridge & Allwright 1972) but that earlier work limited its thinking to a variety (or register) of discourse. Register analysis

on its own cannot ensure transfer from recognition to production. It is important to see the Currie et all (1972) proposals, however, for what they are -- a report of a syllabus for successful intensive courses in the international communication of medical information. The syllabus was one of the activity-observation-remedy type involving doctors as learners in simulated diagnostic conferences. There was no intention of adding to 'notional' theory.

Candlin (1974) voices a concern related to discourse in the new syllabuses. Discourse is more than the essential notional categories. It also includes a propositional structure and sociolinguistic meanings. My remarks on rhetoric in this paper emphasize how heartily I agree with Candlin on this point. Unfortunately, we are ill-informed on the relationships between propositions and discourse but an interesting publication by two members of Concordia University, Matière et Manière (d'Hollander and Newsham) paves the way for a substantial study of this field at present nearing completion by Gwen Newsham. An excellent contribution to the literature of discourse analysis has just emerged from the Birmingham team under John Sinclair (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975).

There is a very real danger of over-using the terms 'notional' or 'semantic'. David Wilkins has reported that he estimates that 60% of new material for the E.F.L. field at present with publishers is claimed to be notional. Here we have 'been speaking prose all our lives'[2] Yet, if the movement is to be of lasting value we must expect to find, like a good argument, that the audience (and textbook writers) are predisposed to accept it. There is also an attendant danger of dilution,

that the approach may diminish to a vague feeling that text 'a' or 'b' is good for communication. If TG-inspired school courses masqueraded under a veneer of rewrite arrows and misleading redefinitions, such as 'generate-produce', it is perfectly possible that soon 'notion' will be misinterpreted as 'hunch'.

A development before the notional approach became widely publicized but of the greatest interest to us here is the design and publication of a course called 'English for Business' (1973) by O.U.P. in conjunction with the British Council and the B.B.C. This is a multi-media course, involving the professionally written and produced, planned/video-taped) or audio-taped story of a firm engaged in the development and production of a component for a new electric car. The episodes of the film develop a story of planning, debate, trouble (there is a fire), financial negotiation, etc. The 13 episodes are the input; the modules of study (a) maximize the input (did the group understand it?) (b) elicit new structures, idioms, etc. and try to establish them in class and language lab, (c) lead to replicative (or possibly creative) role simulation. The research for this syllabus and the writing were carried out by the English Language TEaching Development Unit of Oxford University Press under the direction of John Webb - a unit which is 'nested' in the Colchester English Study Centre. The initial trials of English for Business were carried out there during my time as the Centre's Director.

A more ambitious (and higher level) syllabus, again on the semantic pattern - language taught for the patent needs of communication - was at that time called 'State your Case'. With an input of tape and text it was possible to divide the group into faction A and faction B and suported by pre-faction preparation and briefing to

run a confrontation meeting, involving role playing, hammering out a business problem, and revealing inter alia exactly where the communication difficulties of the special group lay. Thus a remedial follow-up (including report writing) could be effectively handled.

How do these proposals fit in with the European school system? At this stage, the answer has to be (a) that the proposals for the semantic syllabus are too new (in their present form) for school systems to have adopted it. We must remember that school systems usually react not to the proposal for X but to materials written for classroom use embodying X. The time lag can be considerable. Those of us who have been trying to shape senior language material for European schools have had to project our own ideas into the semantic syllabus. May I illustrate this from a project I alunched in 1972 in which the varieties/structures/topics for senior lycée and gymnasium levels were those arising from typical fields of discourse representative of the socio-cultural life of Britain. Texts (written and spoken) of widely different varieties were used and juxtaposed within a given theme. The teaching moved from contact with the texts to an awareness of contrast, to role simulation and guided conversation, directed towards situationally specific utterances. Five units of this course were tried out in Europe and proved to be extremely difficult to handle. Looking back at my own work in 1973, I detect what may be a common malaise - taking as the starting point a text endowed with teachable communication features. Starting from text is, for most teachers, prescriptive. Further, the text has an established status in European teaching, and classes expect to atomize it. This can lead to a less than creative response to the teaching of utterances relevant to the situation.

The idea came to Canada with me and I was able in 1974 to work further on 12 units at a lower level (Advanced Classes in the English Language Summer School) employing the thematic approach to the study of varieties of communication. Currie, 1974 LIFELINES, unpublished), but again there are signs that in the teacher's hands text dominates the input and interests the learners for atomistic reasons. My reading of Wilkins would lead me to feel that this is the reverse of the expected approach; one would start with experience (say of a life situation) and move back through talk into the communication forms which the developing situation makes necessary.

Notice that, despite the infancy of the approach to the semantic syllabus, I see the implications in terms of materials and methods. There is an area of concern, however, which demands urgent attention, if these new trends are to be allowed to develop for Europe - teacher training. Europe has an on-going, vigorous retraining programme for practicing English teachers. I could specify local seminars, take-home training programmes on tape, workshops and study tours. But a teacher expected to handle a communication specific syllabus is faced with judgements of a very demanding sort. There are judgements of a complex socio-linguistic nature; judgements of intention and tone, purpose and effect. While I accept that many teachers in Europe today have the skills required to make these judgements, I am conscious that both knowledge of the aims of semantic teaching of language, and the wisdom required to interpret discourse require special training. I would hope that an immediate priority would be placed by the Council of Europe in planning the training of teachers for these responsibilities.

From my viewpoint, then, Europe is torn between the known emptiness of its secondary school programmes and the richness of its elementary and emerging adult programmes. On balance the movement is towards rhetoric ('universe of discourse') and is undertaken with a strong socio-linguistic orientation. Communication, rather than language itself is the main focus.

They say that over the entrance to Plato's Academy there was an octahedron and the caveat 'Let none ignorant of geometry enter'. Over the portals of the new Europe there ought to be something more Aristotelian drawn, probably a human being trying to communicate We should welcome this change and I hope we would all want to enter ... but geometry was easier.

W.B. Currie

Bibliography

Austin, J.L. (1955): How to do Things with Words, Oxford.

Bloomfield, L., (1933): Language, New York.

Burig, K., (1972): The Specification of Objectives in a Language Learning System for Adults, Stuttgart. (Abstracted in British Council ELT Documents 74/3).

Candlin, C.N. (1972): The Status of Pedagogical Grammar, AIMAV/

Candlin, C.N. (1973): Some Metalinguistic Problems in Communicative Language Learning. AIMAV/DIDIER. (Corosa, S.P. & Poulet, E.(eds.))

Carroll, J.B. (1965): The Contributions of Psychological Theory and Educational Research to the Teaching of Foreign Languages. MLJ XLIX. May 1965, 273-281.

Casey, D.J. (1968): The Effectiveness of Two Methods of Teaching English and Foreign Language in Some Finnish Secondary Schools. Institute of Education, Helsinki, No. 24.

Christensen, F. (1967): Notes Towards a New Rhetoric, London.

Curriculum for the Teaching of English in European Secondary Schools (1969. British Council, E.T.I.C., London.

Currie, W.B. (1973): New Directions in Teaching English Language, Longmans, London.

Currie, W.B., Sturtridge, G. & Allwright, J. (1972): A Technique of Teaching Medical English, AILA Third Congress, Proceedings, Copenhagen 1972 Vol. III, 214-225.

Davies, A. (1971): Aptitude for and Proficiency in French in the First Year of the U.K. Secondary School in Applications of Linguistics (Trim, J. Lim & Perrer, G. Eds.) Cambridge.

van Ek, J.A. (1972): The Threshhold Level (Unit/Credit System) Analysis and Definition, Stuttgart (Abstract in ELT Documents (74/3) by E.T.I.C. British Council, London.

van Ek., J.A. (1975): Specification of the Threshhold Level (forthcoming).

English for Business (1973) (The Bellcrest Series) Oxford.

Firth, J.R. (1935): The Techniques of Semantics, T.P.S.: 1935, (in Firth 1964, 7-34).

Firth, J.R. (1937): The Tongues of Man (Reported by Oxford 1964). London.

Firth, J.R. (1964): Papers in Linguistics, 1934-1951, Oxford (First published 1959).

Gleason, H.A. (1964): What Grammar? HER, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1964.

Grierson, H.J.C. (1944): Rhetoric and English Composition, Edinburgh.

Hawkes, N. (1974): Some Considerations of Principle for TEFL in the European Primary School, British Council ELT Documents, (74/3).

d'Hollander, P. & Newsham, G. (1974): Matière et Manière; Beyond the Sentence. Aquila, Montreal.

Halliday, M.J. (1974): On Learning How to Mean, Arnold, London.

Levin, L. (1969): Implicit and Explicit (The GUME Project) Research Bull. No. 1. Dec. 1969. Gothenburg School of Education, Sweden.

Lyons, J. (1963): Structural Semantics, London.

Lyons, J. (1966): Firth's Theory of Meaning; in Bazell (et al)(eds.) In Memoriam J.R. Firth (1966). Longmans, London.

Richterich, R. (1972): Language Needs and Types of Adults, Stuttgart (Abstraction in British Council ELT Documents (74/3)).

Sinclair, J.McH. & Coulthard, R.M. (1975): Towards an Analysis of Discourse, Oxford.

Smith, P.D. and Berger, E. (1968): An Assessment of Three Foreign Language Teaching Strategies Utilizing Three Language Laboratory Systems. Pennsylvania State Department of Public Instruction, Harrisburg.

Strevens, P.D. (1970): Language Teaching in Trends in Linguistics, Vol IX, European Linguistics, Mouton.

Trim, J.L.M. (1972): The Unit/Credit System for Adult Learning, Stuttgart.

Wilkins, D.A. (1972): The Common Core in a Unit/Credit System (Linguistic and Situational Content). Stuttgart. (Abstracted in British Council LET Documents (74/3)).